

Response Guidelines
For
Reported Gray Wolf Activity
In Washington State

Coordinating Agencies:

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife
USDA/APHIS – Wildlife Services

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PURPOSE

These response guidelines are a cooperative effort between the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) and U.S. Department of Agriculture Wildlife Services (WS). The purpose of the guidelines is to prepare for a coordinated and effective response to possible situations that may occur if wolf/human interactions take place in Washington State. **This is not a wolf management plan or recovery plan.** It does not contain any objectives for establishing wolves in Washington State. The guidelines adhere to Federal and, where appropriate, State law and policy and emphasize close interagency and inter-governmental coordination and a common understanding of specific roles and responsibilities between all involved agencies.

BACKGROUND

The following information provides some background on the legal status of wolves in Washington, management authorities, the history of wolves in Washington, and issues surrounding their migration into the State.

1. The gray wolf has been extirpated from Washington, meaning that the species, which was native to Washington, is thought to no longer occur here.

A female wolf, radio-collared in Montana, was present in northeastern Washington for 2-3 days in the winter of 2002. In addition, there have been numerous, unconfirmed wolf sightings in the State over the past few years. However, there are no confirmed wild wolf packs in Washington at this time. Research conducted on wolves from 1979 through the late 1990s indicates that wolves, once given an opportunity, will establish new packs by dispersing into new areas. The average pack size ranges from 3 to 19 wolves, according to a 1999 study of wolves in the central Rocky Mountains.

2. The gray wolf is listed as 'endangered' in Washington under the Federal Endangered Species Act (ESA). As long as the gray wolf remains Federally listed under the ESA, the USFWS has overall lead responsibility for wild wolves in Washington. Wild wolves that enter the State are fully protected by the ESA, which is administered and enforced by the USFWS. Wolf hybrids have no Federal or State legal status.

For species listed under the Federal ESA, activities that may result in "take" of endangered species are generally prohibited. The definition of take under the ESA includes to harass, harm, pursue, hunt, shoot, wound, kill, trap, capture, or collect, or attempt to engage in any such conduct.

3. The gray wolf is also listed as endangered by the State of Washington and receives protection under State law (WAC 232.12.014, RCW 77.15.120). The State may designate agents or enter into cooperative agreements with Federal agencies to enforce State law. The Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission may also promulgate rules to authorize Federal and State agencies concerned with the management of fish and wildlife resources to lethally remove wolves under limited circumstances.

The WDFW currently has a cooperative agreement with the USFWS, under Section 6 of the Federal ESA, that provides WDFW authority to manage for the conservation of endangered or threatened species, including gray wolves, within the State, except for lethal take of those species.

4. The Federal gray wolf recovery program in the northwestern United States is focused on maintaining viable wolf populations in parts of Idaho, Montana, and Wyoming. There are no federally sponsored plans to promote wolf recovery in Washington. However, wolves may move into the State from the expanding central Idaho or northwestern Montana populations, or from Canada, and it is anticipated that packs may become established in Washington in the future.
5. When the wolf is Federally delisted, management authority will revert to the State. In anticipation of this, the WDFW is initiating development of a state wolf conservation and management plan.
6. The WDFW strives to recover extirpated native species whenever possible. However, the agency has no plans to reintroduce wolves to Washington. As noted above, it is expected that wolves will disperse naturally into the State from surrounding populations.

In recognition that wolves may become established in the State in the future, the USFWS, WDFW and WS must be prepared to respond to incidents involving wolves.

7. Tribal governments manage wildlife on their reserved lands and they maintain certain rights to wildlife resources on ceded lands in the State.
8. Wolves sometimes depredate on livestock and/or other domesticated animals and these depredations must be investigated and controlled. Thus, Wildlife Services (WS), the Federal agency with nationwide responsibilities for managing wildlife damage problems, is also a key partner in wolf management in the State.

OVERVIEW OF POTENTIAL SITUATIONS

Discussed below are five situations that might arise in Washington and an overview of the recommended response strategy for each situation. The five situations are:

- 1. Unconfirmed report of wolf activity or sightings.**
- 2. Verified wolf activity, without a problem incident.**
- 3. Report of possible wolf-caused livestock depredation.**
- 4. Report of a wolf capture.**
- 5. Report of an injured or dead wolf.**

Specific incidents will have unique circumstances and responses are likely to vary from case to case to account for individual situations. The cooperating agencies will coordinate their

responses to the various wolf management situations as they arise. If wolf activity is discovered within or adjacent to tribal lands, government-to-government discussions with the affected Tribe will be initiated.

1. Unconfirmed Reports of Wolf Activity (Tracks or Sightings)

USFWS, WDFW and other agencies occasionally receive reports from people who have observed either large tracks or large animals that they think may be wolves. The response procedure is to interview the caller and fill out the observation form that documents details on the observation and where it was located. This information will be stored for future reference.

2. Verified Wolf Activity (Not Involving a Depredation or Conflict)

- Wolf activity in Washington will be considered verified when a State, Federal or Tribal wildlife biologist has been able to see and, to the extent possible, conclusively identify a wild wolf in the field. If current, highly credible reports are received from another source, or if multiple credible reports are received from the same area, appropriate personnel may be sent out to the area to verify it. If there is uncertainty about the identification, wolf experts may be brought in to assist in the confirmation process.
- If wild wolves are confirmed to be present in Washington and the animal(s) has not been implicated in a livestock depredation or other problem incident, USFWS, WS and WDFW will collaborate to monitor the wolf activity to the best of their ability, given available resources. Tribal wildlife agencies may also participate in monitoring activities. In addition, a WDFW local enforcement officer will coordinate with livestock producers in the local area to provide relevant information and what steps they may legally take to prevent depredation.
- The preferred monitoring approach is to capture and radio-collar wolves to facilitate regular tracking of movements. However, this can be difficult to accomplish with a lone wolf that is roaming across wide areas. Available funding and personnel may limit the ability to pursue this approach. Coordinating agencies would likely wait until there are multiple observations of wolf activity in an area – indicating the presence of one or more resident animals – before considering a concerted effort to capture and collar a wolf. A potential alternative approach would be to do periodic surveillance from the ground and air to document tracks and any observed wolf activity.
- The purpose of monitoring wolf activity, once verified, is to determine what areas wolves are using. Also, by knowing where the wolves are located, the agencies may be able to anticipate problem situations and utilize non-lethal techniques to possibly prevent or reduce conflicts. If problem situations do occur, the presence of radio-collared animals will increase the efficiency of subsequent actions.
- Both confirmed and unconfirmed reports of wolf sightings should be mapped, and reports stored by the agency wolf point of contact in their respective offices.

3. **Report of Possible Wolf-Caused Livestock Depredation or Other Domestic Animal Conflict**

WS is the lead Federal agency for animal damage control and, when authorized by USFWS, will implement wolf control actions in Washington. When a report is received claiming that a wolf has attacked livestock (cattle, sheep, horses, mules, herding or guarding animals such as llamas, donkeys and livestock guarding and herding dogs) or other domestic animals, agency response will include the following elements:

- WS investigates. Keys to a successful response include:
 - WS personnel are rapidly notified and respond promptly and determine whether or not it is a wolf depredation;
 - There is prompt coordination with the affected livestock producer to secure the scene;
 - Key individuals in USFWS and WDFW are promptly notified, including USFWS and WDFW Office of Law Enforcement; and
 - There is coordination between USFWS, WDFW, WS, and landowner to plan possible follow-up actions.
- If the WS investigation determines that the depredation was wolf-caused, a response action will be initiated. Site-specific circumstances will dictate what type of response action will be used. Response actions will become more aggressive, if needed, until depredations cease.

4. **Wolf Capture**

Wolves may be caught in traps or snares set for other animals. If a captured wolf is healthy, the responding agency will consult with partner agencies prior to initiating an action. Site-specific circumstances will influence how such captures are handled; however, a rapid response and decision will be necessary to ensure the health and well being of the animal. USFWS Office of Law Enforcement should immediately be consulted in this situation (to make a legal determination about the capture, properly document the event, and initiate further action if necessary).

Factors that will be considered when responding to a wolf capture include the following:

- If there is no history of wolf problems in the area where the animal is captured, the preferred approach is on-site release. However, decisions regarding how to manage the issue will be made on a case-by-case basis. An evaluation will be made to determine if there have been any reported wolf problems in the area prior to making a release decision. Interagency coordination will be initiated to determine what should be done with the animal.
- If an on-site release is being considered, an evaluation of the animal's health will be conducted prior to release. If the wolf is injured, depending on the severity of the injury, a decision will be made on whether or not to release the animal. Female wolves with pups

captured on public lands prior to October 1 should be released in the same area as capture unless there have been repeated depredations in the area.

- If the animal is collared and released, collaborating agencies will monitor its movements as regularly as possible.
- If a decision is made to hold the animal, arrangements will be made with an appropriate kennel facility and veterinary care will be arranged, if needed.

5. Report of a Dead or Injured Wolf

USFWS Office of Law Enforcement and WDFW enforcement personnel will immediately be called in to investigate all reports of dead or injured wolves and make a determination about the cause of death or injury, properly document the event, and initiate further action as necessary. The USFWS is responsible for investigating cases that involve unauthorized take of a Federally listed species. The WDFW is responsible for investigating violations of State wildlife laws.

When an injured or dead wolf is found, response will include the following elements:

- USFWS and WDFW Law Enforcement will be immediately notified and they will determine and control all subsequent aspects of the response.
- Keys to a successful response include:
 - Law Enforcement officers are rapidly notified and respond promptly,
 - Scene where the animal was found is left undisturbed and effectively secured,
 - Key individuals in various agencies are promptly notified,
- If an injured wolf is found, actions will be taken immediately to stabilize its condition. Interagency coordination will be initiated to determine what should be done with the animal. Depending on the severity of the injury, a decision will be made on whether or not to release the animal.

Phone Contacts to Report Wolf Observation, Injury, or Suspected Depredation

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Monday through Friday, 8:00 – 4:30, (except federal holidays):

Eastern Washington:

Spokane..... (509) 891-6839

Western Washington:

Lacey (360) 753-9440

USFWS Office of Law Enforcement to report dead or injured wolves:

Spokane/Richland(509) 375-6202
Lacey(360) 753-7764
Redmond(425) 883-8122
Bellingham(360) 733-0963
Portland(503) 780-9771

USFWS Office of Law Enforcement after hours:

Call Washington State Patrol Office (425-649-4370). Tell dispatcher which county is involved and ask to be connected to a USFWS Special Agent.

Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, Monday through Friday, 8:00 – 5:00:

Spokane(509) 892-1001
Ephrata(509) 754-4624
Yakima(509) 575-2740
Vancouver(360) 696-6211
Mill Creek(425) 775-1311
Montesano(360) 249-4628
Olympia(360) 902-2200

USDA Wildlife Services, Statewide, Monday through Friday, 8:00 – 5:00:

Olympia(360) 753-9884

For Emergency and after-hours:

Contact your local State Patrol Office and ask to be connected to a local WDFW wildlife officer.

Washington State 24 hr Wolf Reporting Hotline.....888-584-9038